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ABSTRACT

A challenge for teachers and administrators has been to develop security policies that will effectively reduce violence and improve school climate. This paper describes students' reactions to security measures implemented at a Chicago high school that served a low-socioeconomic-status neighborhood comprised predominantly of African-American and Hispanic populations. The school hired more security guards, enforced a student-uniform policy, and spent $40,000 on communication technology. Data were obtained from a survey of 30 out of the total 1,274 students at the high school. Findings indicate that a majority of the students favored the new security measures and approved of the zero-tolerance policy and the wearing of student identification badges. A significant number of students agreed that additional security personnel had improved security and reduced violence in the halls. However, a large proportion believed that school uniforms did not deter gang violence. One table is included. (Contains 12 references.) (LMI)

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# STUDENTS OPINIONS OF THE NEW SECURITY MEASURES/EQUIPMENT IN THEIR HIGH SCHOOL

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# STUDENTS OPINIONS OF THE NEW SECURITY MEASURES/EQUIPMENT IN THEIR HIGH SCHOOL

Florence Hernandez

One of the challenges for teachers and administrators has been to develop security policies that will effectively reduce violence and improve school climate. Traditionally accepted methods such as out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension and detention have emerged as techniques that are frequently ineffective. In some instances the punishments (such as suspension) have been identified as more a reward than a punishment for misbehavior. Research indicates acquiring security guards or better technology can be part of the solution for a school. Nevertheless, educational leaders must consider a broad array of safety factors - technology, building design, supervisory procedures, discipline practices, conflict resolution, and other instruction built into the curriculum. In order to combat gang violence and provide a safer environment for the students in our high school, our new Principal and the Local School Council developed new security policies, hired more security guards, enforced a uniform dress code, and spent $40,000 on communication technology this school year. Communication technology purchased to enhance our school's safety standards include: walkie-talkies, hand-held metal detectors, surveillance cameras and monitors. The students' opinions are a big factor in realizing whether or not the new security measures/equipment have improved safety in the school. It is of great significance to know what they think, therefore, students' opinions need to be represented in the research. If it is found that students

and researchers are in agreement concerning tougher security measures, then we can move on to developing conflict resolution and other instruction to further improve school climate. Consequently, by beginning to develop a comprehensive set of approaches that prevents youth violence and promotes youth development, schools together with communities can contain violence, as well as reduce and prevent tomorrow's. We owe our children, and ourselves, nothing less.

Schools must be safe places for children to learn and teachers to teach. During the past decade, images of schools as safe havens have been replaced by metal detectors, drive-by shootings, gang warfare, and a generation of school children living in fear. We all have some less than happy memories of school days, maybe our lunch money or other personal belonging was stolen. Maybe a bully intimidated us or a smart mouthed classmate embarassed us to tears.

Although few of us worried about being shot, intentionally or by accident. Today's children do worry, and with good reason. The Illinois Criminal Justice Authority reports 33 percent of all Illinois school children carry weapons sometime during the year. Five percent carry a gun. A 1990 survey by the Federal Centers for Disease Control indicates that more than half a million students - 568,000 - or about one in 20 students - walk into school with a gun each day.

To combat school violence steps have been taken to provide an educa\'on for students in a safe environment. Administrators have focused on a range of prevention efforts to make schools safe once again. They include strict standards of discipline and security equipment regarding school safety and violence prevention. New security measures/equipment is defined as the school uniform policy, the zero

tolerance policy on gangs, school I.D. badges, metal detectors, walkie-talkies, surveillance cameras and monitors, and hand-held metal detectors.

A zero-tolerance policy has been established to combat gang violence. School uniforms have been in place since the fall to eliminate the wearing of gang colors. Student identification badges must be worn to gain entrance into the building and must be visible throughout the school day. As students enter the building, they must pass through metal detectors. A closed campus policy is in force.

There are critics who believe that hiring guards, adding police officers, installing metal detectors and communication technology is not enough. It's not enough to fortify the gates of the school. They believe, we can and must do more. Programs should be implemented into the curriculum to curb violence. An anti-violence campaign that teaches alternatives to violence such as peer mediation, anger control, conflict resolution are positive skills to develop in students. Security measures/equipment are a part of the solution but the school has to do more than simply respond to acts of violence as they occur. In addition to instruction built into the curriculum, crisis response follow-up-activities need to be developed to restore the school to order after a crisis. The staff needs to communicate a genuine caring and concern for all students. Then we may have more of an influence on student's behavior than if we threaten them. We need to instill values that help students find humanity within themselves so they can care about others. Critics feel technology might create better security systems, but it can't stop a man with a gun who shoots at students in a drive-by.

On the other hand, there are others who believe in the zero-tolerance policy to maintain safety and security in the schools. The public is fed up. This holds true across racial, ethnic and religious lines. Parents and the general public want the schools to be free of drugs and violence. They want the schools to be free of disruption and disorder. Specifically, they want students to be expelled from schools if they are caught with drugs or weapons. They want strict standards of discipline enforced to improve good habits such as being on time, being dependable and exercising self-control. In addition, they strongly feel that a persistent troublemaker should be removed from the class or school if necessary. Concentration should be emphasized on those students who are ready to learn. Alternative schools should be offered as an option for the chronically disruptive students to provide them with the opportunity to get the extra help and attention they need.

Advocates of communication technology within the school feel while it may be expensive, it's absolutely critical to a school's capacity to protect itself from violence. The old public address systems are useless for even the most effective minimal internal communications.

School uniforms are another issue that school officials believe will deter violent behavior. The assumption is that students will not be inclined to violent behavior if they do not see or wear clothings that glorifies gang affiliation. Their dress sends a message of who they are or who they want to be. Therefore, a ban on gang symbols, caps, jewelry, etc., must be enforced.

On November 20, 1984, a crowd of students emerged from Simeon Vocational High School. It was there that Benjy Wilson, considered the best high school

basketball player in the country, was shot and killed. This random, senseless act of killing a young man of such potential affected people everywhere. His death made national headlines. It symbolized the direction in which the country, particularly the inner cities, was moving. Rancer and Kosberg (1994) said, " police statistics in 1964 revealed that 119 people between the ages of 11 and 20 had been murdered in Chicago by the end of October." In other cities across the country similar statistics were recorded.

The problem of violence among adolescents and teens remains critical. According to USA Today (Nov. 11,1994), a survey conducted by the National League of Cities finds that in the past five years, school violence has increased in almost 40% of the communities surveyed. The survey found that one in four schools reported serious injuries or death. Homocide is considered to be one of the leading causes of death of young people in the inner cities. The report states that school violence is not confined to inner-city schools, but also include, suburban, non-metro, and rural schools are also reporting significant incidences of violence.

Fox (1993) who completed a study of national trends in juvenile homicide, explains that there are two major changes to indicate why this generation of youth is more violent than any other. First, this generation has more dangerous drugs in their bodies, behavior-altering stimulants, and more deadly weapons in their hands, high powered firearms and assault rifles. This generation is also more likely to resort to violence over seemingly trivial issues. Teenagers are using an equalizer to solve the most mundance problems: a "beef" over something someone said, a fallout over a girl, a suspected slight, a pair of sneakers, or a Raiders jacket.

Young people learn to watch their backs, not look to their futures. They are children of rage and rebellion who are forever biting the hand that didn't feed them.

Since passage of the inclusive provision in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P. L. 94-142) in 1975, schools have had a zero reject legal obligation to educate all children, including those with emotional and behavioral handicaps (Brendtro and Long, 1995). There are schools who strive to create a safe, inclusive environment for all students and attempt to resocialize troublesome students. While other educators, driven by zero tolerance, resort to punishment and expulsion.

Today we are mass producing hordes of adult-detached children. Families are disrupted by divorce, abuse, poverty, drugs, and other forces that interfere with normal parenting. Subsequently, adults whose own lives are chaotic are not monitoring their children's activities or affiliations. They are not communicating consistent behavioral expectations.

These adult-wary adolescents are not successful in factory schools. They reach out to others who are alienated - gangs and/or criminal mentors, who enculturate them in anti-social lifestyles. School discipline that is rooted in punishment or exclusion only further estranges these students.

Violence is only one aspect of school safety, but it has now become the barometer by which school safety is judged (Watson, 1995). It is more than just another social issue that educators, researchers, and policy makers must focus on. School violence, like the pervasive societal violence, is everyone's problem, and we are all it's victims. School personnel must engage the energy and commitment of students, teachers, families, and community members to assemble plans to safeguard

our schools. Schools can be rebuilt into safe havens for students. Linquanti and Berliner (1994) said, "these goals are not in addition to a school's mission to teach and cultivate our nation's young people, as a center of learning within the community, these goals lie at the heart of that mission.

Chicago Public Schools have hired their own security staff, using State Chapter I funds. Composed of parents and other paid community members, the troops have grown since 1990. According to principals, the presence of more adults, particularly parents, has proven to be the most successful deterrent to school violence, more so than the metal detectors.

According to Crouch and Williams (1995), kids say they feel safer when adults are around. Although, Chicago schools are taking other measures to increase safety which include:

- 24 hour security cameras in hallways and lunchrooms (they've drastically reduced gang-related fights).
- character education in which concepts such as honesty, integrity, and values are discussed.
- peer mediation, in which trained students help their peers settle disputes.
- a school "learning center" for kids in trouble to head off minor problems before they mushroom.
- mentoring sessions for male students with male teachers and police officers.
- activities to bolster students' self-esteem, pride in themselves and their culture, and respect for on another (career days, Kwaanza, cheerleading programs, etc.) ; and
- dress code or school uniforms to give kids structure. (p. 60)

The curriculum of the future must be a merger of the technological and the humane, or we will come to a rapid end (Curwin, 1995). We must transform schools into places that teach children to control our violent nature and to change the self-destructive path we are speeding down out of control.

If we want our schools orderly and peaceful in which high-quality education

can take place, students must learn to manage conflicts constructively without physical or verbal violence.

Johnson and Johnson (1995) claim that programs that focus exclusively on violence prevention may generally be ineffective. Schools must go beyond violence prevention to conflict resolution training. Schools need to teach students how to manage conflicts constructively. Schools must seek to create a cooperative context for conflict management, which is easier to do when the majority of learning situations are cooperative. Cooperators have a long-term time orientation and focus their energies both on achieving mutual goals and on maintaining good working relationships with others. Secondly, administrators must strive to decrease in-school risk factors. The first is academic failure. Schools can promote higher achievement and greater competence in using higher-level reasoning by students by emphasizing cooperative learning more than competitive or individualistic learning.

The second factor that puts adolescents at risk for violent behavior is alienation from schoolmates. Two ways to reduce alienation are (1) using cooperative groups that last for a number of years, and (2) assigning teams of teachers to follow cohorts of students through several grades, instead of changing teachers every year. (Johnson and Johnson, et. al. 1994, 1995). Third, adolescents who are experiencing psychological problems are more at risk for violent behavior than students who are psychologically well-adjusted. Cooperative learning groups can help to reverse the trend of violence. The more adolescents work in cooperative learning groups, the greater will be their self-esteem, social skills, psychological well-being, and resilience in the face of adversity.

In order to show students that conflicts can have positive results, schools should make academic controversies a daily part of learning situations. Academic controversies exists when one student's ideas, opinions, theories, and information differ from another and the two seek to reach an agreement.

Over the past twenty-five years, Johnson and Johnson (1995) have conducted numerous studies on academic controvery concluding that similar to cooperative learning, academic controversy results in increased student achievement, critical thinking, higher-level reasoning, intrinsic motivation to learn, perspective-taking, and a number of other important educational outcomes.

Schools must teach all students how to negotiate and mediate. The more students who are trained how to negotiate, the greater the number of conflicts that will be managed constructively in the school. In short, knowing how to negotiate agreements and mediate classmates' conflicts empower students to regulate their own behavior. The only disadvantage of this approach is the time and commitment required by the faculty.

Teaching prosocial skills is an exciting and promising preventive strategy and may be the nation's best hope of success in the long run. Unfortunately, since it is a long-range strategy, methods of suppression and control will continue to be necessary for years to come (Ill. School Bd. Journal, 1993).

The more years students spend learning and practicing the skills of peer mediation and conflict resolution, chances are increased they will be able to use those skills both in the school and beyond the school door.

It is indeed a sad reflection on our times that in order to pursue the academic

mission of our public schools, principals and teachers need to learn how to handle violent situations. This specialized training may have to become a standard part of teacher and administrator education. What used to happen only on occasion on school campuses around this state and nation has become almost a daily occurrence: some act of intimidation or actual violence by students against fellow students or school personnel.

The insanity must stop. Schools are institutions of learning, not threats. As educators we must find alternate ways to reach out to these chronically disruptive and dangerous students. Simply to turn our backs on these troubled kids does a disservice not only to them but to our society as a whole. It is the obligation of the education system to provide these students the opportunity to be more successful.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine what are students opinions of the new security measures/equipment in reducing school violence and creating a safer environment?

## Procedures

### Population/Sample:

The population for this survey consisted of 1,274 high school students. Most of the students reside in low socioeconomic neighborhoods. They attend a high school on the city's far southeast side. The student population consisted of 779 African-Americans, 453 Hispanic, 40 White, 1 American-Indian, and 1 Asian.A cluster sample was used in this survey. Thirty students were chosen from the LifeScience classrooms.

The SASS (Students Attitudes Toward Safety and Security) was distributed to

thirty students within the high school. They were asked to indicate yes, no, or don't know to each statement by checking their response. The completed questionnaires were placed in a collection envelope in the classroom.

## Findings

The data in the table show that the majority of the students are in favor of the new security equipment/measures that have been put in place to reduce school violence and create a safer environment. According to principals, the presence of more adults, particularly parents, has proven to be the most successful deterrent to school violence. A significant number of students agree that additional security personnel has improved security and reduced violence in the halls. The majority of the

**Table 1**

**One-Dimensional Chi-Square**

| Observed Frequency | Expected Frequency | Cell Chi-Square |
|---|---|---|
| 25.00 | 15.00 | 6.665 |
| 5.00 | 15.00 | 6.665 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Chi-Square | 13.33 |
| Total No. of Observations | 30 |
| No. of Categories (N) | 2 |
| Degrees of Freedom (N - 1) | 1 |

Table Chi Square 3.841

Calculated Chi Square 13.33*

13.33>3.841
*Significant at .05 level of confidence

students also agree that the security equipment including metal detectors, walkie-talkies, surveillance cameras and monitors, and hand-held metal detectors have improved safety and security in the school. Research suggests that communication technology is absolutely critical to a school's capacity to protect itself from violence. The old public address systems are useless in dealing with the demands placed on schools today. A large proportion of students responded negatively to the statements that school uniforms improved safety and security in their high school. This is not reflected in the research. Research implies that school uniforms provide structure and deters violence by not allowing students to advertise their gang colors. Contrary to the research, students commented that school uniforms do not deter gang violence. They stressed that the wearing of school uniforms makes them feel like their in prison. Although they did respond favorably to the wearing of Student I.D. Badges to keep trespassers out of the building.

The students also responded positively to questions on the zero-tolerance policy. Students agree that the zero-tolerance policy to combat gang violence has been effective. Studies also assert that strict standards of discipline need to be enforced and they strongly feel that a persistent troublemaker should be removed from the class or the school if necessary.

In closing, on the whole, students agree with the research findings concerning safety and security in the schools. They agree that additional security personnel do contribute to their safety. They agree that the communication technology has been effective in reducing violence and subsequently creating a safer environment. They agree that the zero-tolerance policy on gangs should be enforced and has proven to

improve the school climate.

The students disagree on the concept of school uniforms. They strongly assert that the school uniforms do not play a role in reducing violence.

Since the students agree with the majority of the research on security measures and equipment, schools must go beyond violence prevention to teaching students how to manage conflicts constructively without physical or verbal violence. Schools need to use cooperative groups and assign teams of teachers to follow cohorts of students through several grades. Teaching prosocial skills is a promising preventive strategy and may be the nation's best hope of success in the long run.

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